Post- Event Summary Report for
Officially Designated WHCOA Events

Name of Event*: Shenandoah University Symposium on Aging, Independence: Strategies for Maintaining Control

Date of Event: March 18 and 19, 2005

Location of Event: Dulles Airport Marriott Hotel, Dulles, Virginia

Number of Persons Attending: 100

Sponsoring Organization(s): Shenandoah University and the Loudoun County Area Agency on Aging

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Priority Issue # 1: Transportation.   Public transportation for medical appointments, social interaction, continuing employment and shopping was identified as an essential part of helping seniors maintain their independence. Additionally, public transportation was identified as a key component for improving air quality, and thus improving the health of all citizens, particularly the elderly.

Barriers: State and federal funding is lacking. Bus schedules and routes are often designed for younger commuters and don't accommodate the needs of older individuals. The Metro (subway) doesn't reach the far western suburbs in Northern Virginia, where many people live.

Proposed Solutions(s): Use gasoline tax to help fund public transportation. Let seniors have a voice in the scheduling and location of bus stops. Give tax incentives to private corporations to develop public transportation, including buses, trains and subways.

Priority Issue # 2: Health.   Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance don't promote preventive health care. The public needs more information about how the environment, especially poor air quality, affects the health of older people. Tele-health and other types of technology can improve the health care of older people.

Barriers: There is little incentive for health insurance providers to pay for preventive health care. In addition, many health professionals and community leaders are uninformed about the effects of the environment on health. Many seniors lack the training to operate computers, and/or do not have the funds to purchase a computer. Also, many older people are apprehensive about technology, particularly in relation to their health.

Proposed Solutions(s): Develop and disseminate information to educate the insurance industry, the medical profession and the citizens on the cost-effectiveness of preventive health care. Promote and fund preventive health care, including smoking cessation and weight loss programs. Create a national health system like the federal employee health insurance. Continue to fully fund the EPA's Aging Initiative program to promote greater understanding of how the

environment affects older people's health. Improve air quality by offering incentives to purchase hybrid automobiles, developing alternative fuel sources, and developing more walking and bicycling trails. Promote the use of computers and other technology as ways to improve health care, and lower its cost. Offer financial assistance to those seniors who are unable to afford a computer or to access the internet.

Priority Issue # 3: Assistive technology and home modification. As people age they become more susceptible to sensory and mobility problems. The use of assistive technology and home modification enables people with disabilities to maintain their independence, and can reduce the number of hospital visits and overall health care costs.

Barriers: Many assistive devices and home modification programs are costly and are not covered by insurance. Individuals, builders and legislators lack understanding about the importance of assistive technologies, home modification and universal building design.

Solution(s): Create federal and state subsidies or tax breaks for the development and use of assistive devices, home modification and the building of Universal Design homes and public buildings. Educate private and public insurance programs on the cost-effectiveness of assistive devices and home modification, and encourage them to cover them. Create and fund public awareness campaigns about what is available, and how the public can access the devices and/or designs. Enforce and strengthen current ADA laws.

Priority Issue # 4: The public image of older people. There is a need to dispel stereotypes of older people being out of touch, living in the past, frail, mentally and physically slow, or no longer interested in learning anything new.

Barriers: The media portrayal of older people is generally negative. Older people tend to keep their accomplishment to themselves, so often younger people don't realize all that elders can do. Also because our society is so mobile, younger people are not as likely to have the opportunity to interact with their grandparents and other seniors.

Solution(s): Encourage federal and state agencies to develop public announcements showing the achievements of active seniors. Improve communication to and about seniors. Include information about aging and older people in high school and college curricula. Encourage older people to participate in creative programs, particularly intergenerational programs. Validate positive perceptions of aging, and reward those who do.

Priority Issue # 5: Crime. Many older people limit activities outside their homes for fear of becoming victims of crime. On the other hand, older people are prime targets for telemarketing or door-to-door scams, identity theft and fraud, as well.

Barriers: Older people are often isolated and thus more vulnerable to scams. Many older people are uncomfortable reporting incidents to law enforcement officials. Law enforcement officials are often not trained to communicate effectively with older people.

Solutions: Create incentives for law enforcement agencies to provide educational outreach to older people. Develop harsher penalties for committing scams and fraud against seniors. Develop law enforcement training to include working with, and communicating with, older

people. Strengthen the national TRIAD program to encourage elders to help themselves and their communities.